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ABSTRACT

Taking the position that Youth for Justice Youth Summits were highly successful in their inaugural year of 1995, this report explains the purpose and goals of the summits. The report also summarizes the activities undertaken in the 47 states (plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) where the summits were held on a state-by-state basis. The summits identified issues and concerns about violence in schools and communities, began work on youth-driven projects to address violence, and facilitated the sharing of information about existing youth violence-prevention activities. Many summits also addressed related issues, including conflict resolution and/or peer mediation, tolerance, racism, domestic violence, media violence, and dropout prevention. Students, teachers, and school administrators participated in the events, and often they were joined by members of the United States House and Senate, state senators and representatives, city mayors, city council members, state attorneys general, members of state and local bar associations, judges, lawyers, and law enforcement officials. In this manner, the summits engaged students in interactive learning about violence and legal issues through discussion with community members and their peers. The summits encouraged students to be active participants in solutions to problems in their schools and communities. (LH)

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Chicago, Illinois

1995

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Bulletin

American Bar Association ABA Special Committee on Youth Education for Citizenship $1.50

Youth Summits: Youth and Adults as Partners in Violence Prevention

"I have to start with myself *to combat violence,"* concluded one participant at the 1995 Wisconsin youth summit.

The Wisconsin summit was one of fifty youth summits held across America, part of a "Season of Summits" conceived and supported by Youth for Justice, the national coordinated law-related education program.

Youth for Justice and Law-Related Education

Youth for Justice is a unique national initiative that uses the power of active learning about the law to help youth address the risks of being young in today's society. Youth for Justice is designed to give young people an understanding of the law and to equip them with strategies for their active involvement in solving national problems, particularly violence by and against youth.

Early exposure to the principles and practices of law provides young people with insights into the legal system that lessen the chances of their becoming involved in crime, as perpetrators or as victims, now and later in life. Young people who understand the law are more likely to develop into knowledgeable, responsible, and caring citizens. Research on national, state, and local law-related education programs through the last two decades has demonstrated the benefits of law-related education in preparing young people for participation in civic life and in preventing delinquency. An important element of successful law-related education programs is opportunities for interactive learning through which young people reach a deep understanding of legal issues through discussion with adults (e.g., lawyers, judges, police officers, government officials) and their peers.

Interaction as Education

Education takes many forms. Teacher-student interaction is but one of them. Student-student interaction, particularly when the students are from diverse environments and regions—the inner city, suburbs, and rural areas, for example—are another. The lessons learned from students' interaction with the world beyond the classroom are memorable.

Whether they are in small rural or large urban communities, young people face common issues of survival in a rapidly changing and complex world. Opportunities for young people to meet and interact with peers outside their immediate environments are rare. Young people benefit from new ideas and perspectives that emerge from discussion with their peers, and are encouraged by the examples of other young people whose positive actions are improving their communities.

Student interaction with adult community members is a vital educational strategy. Research has shown that meaningful interaction with adult leaders helps young people develop positive attitudes toward our government and the people in it. Discussions with policy makers enliven issues and introduce different perspectives. Young people appreciate knowing that, if they show the initiative, government will be responsive. An early, and important, step forward is Youth for Justice's youth summit program.

Youth Summits

Youth summits are events designed to help youth and adults identify and understand public policy issues and to encourage young people to be actively involved in developing solutions to problems facing their communities. Youth summits provide a forum through which young people can (1) share their perspectives on serious problems that directly affect them; (2) make recommendations to policy makers, and each other, for reducing and eliminating problems; (3) learn from other young people, and the adults working with them, who have been successful in addressing problems; and (4) design projects through which they can be active participants in solutions to problems. Summits give young people an opportunity to share their ideas in an environment where their opinions are sought, listened to, and respected.

The first Youth for Justice youth summits, held in the spring of 1995, brought young people together to work on problems of violence in their schools and communities. Youth summits are particularly appropriate strategies for violence prevention. To know something of another group lessens the probability of stereotyping because it promotes understanding. "I have a suburban view of life. I got to see how inner-city kids think," remarked a participant in Illinois's youth summit. Also, to be heard by policy makers and recognized as a valuable member of the political process connects young people to our democratic system. As another participant stated, "[What was important was] the close proximity of elected officials and the fact that we possibly could affect their decisions and legislation."

State law-related education project directors led youth summit planning. Each summit was individually planned, conducted, and evaluated, and young people, mostly middle and high school students, were actively involved in all stages. Summits were used to identify issues and concerns about violence, to begin work on "youth-driven" projects to address violence, and/or to recognize and share information about existing youth violence-prevention activities. Many participants prepared for the summits by surveying the opinions of their fellow students and formulating recommendations for effective resolutions of perceived problems. One state's survey of over 2,000 high school students reported these perceptions of violence:

- Major problems in schools are alcohol and drug use, theft, and verbal insults. Minor problems are pushing, shoving, grabbing, and verbal threats.
- Boredom, lack of motivation to learn, alcohol and drug use, and a lack of parental supervision are major contributing factors to violence in schools.
- The most frequently cited group of students likely to be victims of violence are gays and lesbians, followed by students having low self-esteem and by students who are physically weak.
- Being less eager to participate in class, lack of attention, and staying home from school were the most frequently cited effects of violence.
- Of the students responding to the poll, 16% said they saw violence in their school, home, or community more than ten times in the past year; 15% saw it from five to ten times; 56% saw it one to four times; and 13% saw no violence during the past year.

Survey results, such as the one above, and study of the problem allowed the summit participants to represent their schools with authority. The information stimulated discussion and allowed adult and student presenters to test assumptions held by the participants. As with other Youth for Justice programs, summits built young people's knowledge about the law and government, skills, and attitudes through interactive teaching and learning strategies. Participants emerged better prepared to take responsibility for their actions and to become leaders in their schools and in their communities.

1995: A Good Beginning

In 1995, youth summits were held in 47 states (two in California), the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. While all summits focused on general issues of youth violence and violence prevention, many summits addressed related issues, including conflict resolution and/or peer mediation, tolerance,

Youth Summits: A National-State Partnership

Youth summits offer examples of national-state partnership that makes effective use of public/private funds. Consider the following:

- $163,970 was expended from Youth for Justice funds for state-level activities associated with the summits, of which $128,082 was for implementation and $35,888 for planning.
- The state-level programs were very successful in leveraging substantial local resources and in-kind contributions. $296,348 in leveraged funds was a good showing, especially in the program's first year.
- Approximately $1.81 in local funds was leveraged for every $1.00 in federal funding spent on planning and implementing the summits. Considering only the funding spent directly on implementation, $2.31 in local money was spent for every federal dollar allocated to the program.

Bulletin

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Youth for Justice Participants

Youth for Justice is supported by the United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and Congress. The five cooperating national organizations—the American Bar Association Special Committee on Youth Education for Citizenship, the Center for Civic Education, the Constitutional Rights Foundation, the National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law, and Phi Alpha Delta's Public Service Center—assist a national network of state and local law-related education leaders throughout the country. The program's aim is to build partnerships among legal, educational, governmental, and community groups, and to initiate and strengthen law-related education.

school climate, racism, domestic violence, media violence, and dropout prevention.

The impact from the "Season of Summits" was significant, especially for the first year of the effort. Consider the following:

- Approximately 11,000 persons participated in youth summits in 1995. Overall, students comprised 80.1 percent of the total number of attendees, teachers 9.9 percent, administrators 1.8 percent, and other adults 8.2 percent.
- The largest summit had 3,575 participants; the smallest had 46. The average attendance was 159 persons.
- Twenty-six states had presummit activities for youth and/or teachers that included law-related-education lessons, surveys, and assignments focusing on youth violence.
- Eighteen states had students develop action plans to prevent violence in their schools or communities.
- Twenty-five states planned postsummit activities (service learning projects, school-based summits, or reports).

State-by-State Summits

Following are summaries of the activities at each 1995 state summit. Students, teachers, and school administrators participated in the events, and they often were joined by members of the U.S. House and Senate, state senators and representatives, city mayors, city council members, state attorneys general, members of state and local bar associations, judges, lawyers, and law enforcement officials. In many states, the media provided coverage, with summit proceedings reported on television and radio and in newspapers.

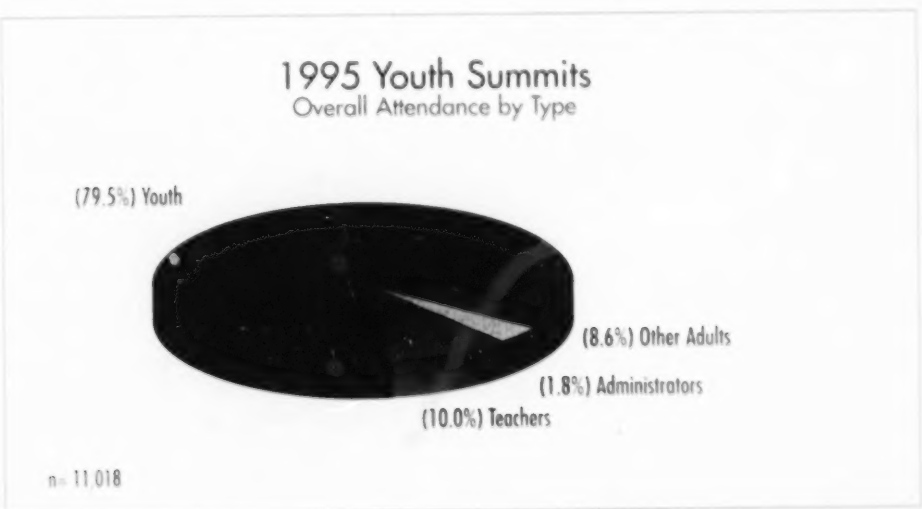
In **Alabama,** high school students led teams of elementary and middle school students in discussions about violence and recommendations for change. The state attorney general and United States attorney participated in group discussions, which were videotaped for Alabama Public Television.

In **Alaska,** high school students participated in a summit that was linked to the governor's student health conference. Summit participants used minigrants to implement projects related to violence prevention.

In **Arizona,** a diverse group of high school students representing 15 counties were selected to participate in the summit. The students discussed and proposed recommendations to a panel of state legislators and officials from the executive and judicial branches of government.

In **Arkansas,** middle and high school students from across the state discussed issues related to violence with law enforcement officials and the prosecuting attorney for Pulaski County.

California's *Sacramento* summit, "Forum on Youth and Violence," featured interactive sessions for high school students and state policy makers. In the *Santa Clara* summit, survey results from students and teachers were used to introduce concerns about gangs and violence. Participants discussed violence with the state's superintendent of public instruction and attorney general.



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Each school team in **Utah** was joined by adult advisors to develop an action plan to address violence in schools and in their communities. Students learned from each other and involved adults in discussions of responses to violence.

Virginia's youth summit initiated a dialogue about violence prevention and built awareness of law-related education as an approach to prevention. Participants used the information provided at the summit to create violence-prevention plans for individual schools and communities.

Representatives from statewide youth groups working on violence prevention participated in the **Washington** summit. They discussed recently passed legislation on "youth in crisis" with the state attorney general and examined a proposed extension of a gang-tracking program; the nature of violence in the United States; the state harassment and stalking law; and the needs of youth violence-prevention organizations.

In **West Virginia,** discussions were held on survey results on violence in the schools; the prevalence of weapons, drugs, harassment, and bigotry; and programs, such as peer mediation, that are effective in mitigating violence.

In **Wisconsin,** students discussed the causes of youth violence. Students from a Milwaukee high school and a rural high school organized a student exchange program as a means of ensuring continued understanding of the differing problems between the two institutions. Students presented public service announcements they had created to address youth violence, and Wisconsin Public Television was on hand to give an award for the most original announcement.

In **Wyoming,** after using teleconferencing to prepare their proposals, school teams took their violence prevention proposals to the governor, eight state legislators, the entire state supreme court, mayors, school boards, and other government agencies and civic groups. Proposals are being developed for consideration by the legislature in the 1996 session.

Youth Summits: A Successful Partnership

"If a generation is lost, it's because the generation before it did not take the time to show it the way," said a Wisconsin student. In 1995—their first year—the youth summits have been highly successful in preparing young leaders and problem solvers. Involvement in planning, organizing, and implementing the Youth for Justice summits offers young people a stake in the well-being of their communities and their nation. The summits supplement classroom experiences, with students being given the opportunity to interact directly in a meaningful manner with state and local leaders, law enforcement officials, and other influential community members. Youth summits, like other law-related education activities, nurture the skills and attitudes needed to help young people become problem solvers and fully prepared citizens of the future.

For more information about youth summits, state and local law-related education organizations, or other Youth for Justice programs, contact the National Law-Related Education Resource Center at 312/988-5735.

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In **Mississippi,** summit participants presented research on violence in their schools and public policy advocacy plans to a panel of state leaders, including a state senator, judge, and representative of the governor.

In **Missouri,** middle and high school students discussed and presented their ideas for violence prevention to a former United States senator.

In **Montana,** students from schools that demographically represent the state's cultural and geographic diversity traveled to regional telecommunication centers to compare their concerns with participants from other schools. The students spoke with federal, state, and local officials, and developed local violence prevention strategies.

Nebraska's youth summit introduced information on violence in Nebraska and on model programs that have proved effective in combating youth violence in other states. Teams planned actions for reducing violence in their communities.

In **Nevada,** discussions were held on guns and violence, weapons in schools, domestic violence, entertainment and violence, and street violence and gangs. Proposed solutions were presented to local and state policy makers in a public hearing at the summit. Several students later gave testimony on their subjects to the state assembly.

New Hampshire's youth summit was designed to help middle schools implement and strengthen peer mediation programs to reduce violence in schools. Following the summit, schools received start-up funds to continue development of mediation programs.

New Jersey students spent several months learning about violence prevention. Students presented their violence prevention plans to a panel of local government, education, and law enforcement officials. Students also presented workshops on peer mediation techniques.

After months of planning, **New Mexico** students discussed and presented innovative violence prevention strategies, including promoting "random acts of kindness," providing peer mediation for younger students, producing a "Stop the Violence" video, and creating a violence-prevention hotline.

In **New York,** high school seniors presented findings based on six months of research on the effects of violence on communities. Some of their proposed solutions included mandating multiculturally themed classes in order to "bridge the gap of ignorance and hatred," smaller class sizes, more personalized student-teacher interaction, crisis intervention training for teachers to learn how to protect themselves as well as their students, and classes aimed at preventing abuse before it starts.

In **North Carolina,** middle and high school students discussed action plans for their schools to curb violence. Student participants replicated the summit for their schools.

North Dakota's summit provided conflict resolution training to students and teachers. Students shared their experiences in addressing violence in their schools and communities.

In **Ohio,** students from middle schools selected and researched violence issues in their school or community. They identified solutions and selected a team to present their work at the summit. Three thousand copies of the descriptions of their research and recommendations were distributed across the state.

Oklahoma students attended a four-day summit, during which they provided information to state legislators regarding violence-related issues.

In **Oregon,** summit participants met to discuss racism and violence. They voted to adopt a violence-control program for elementary students, to try to convince schools to use "celebrating diversity" as the theme for May Fête activities, and to encourage the development of a class on cultural diversity.

In **Pennsylvania,** where the program focused on peer mediation of conflicts, students learned and practiced mediation skills. Students demonstrated mediation programs at a session for state legislators following the summit.

In **Puerto Rico,** young people discussed and recommended prevention activities for issues such as drugs and alcohol, teen sex, family violence, criminal behavior, peer pressure, decision making, school dropouts, and causes of violence. The public broadcast channel recorded the sessions for a television special.

Rhode Island's summit was held in a talk show format, followed by workshops and the adoption of recommendations on how best to curb violence in school. The student teams will reassemble in a televised open forum to explain their violence prevention plans.

South Dakota conducted its youth summit over the Rural Development Telecommunications Network, making it possible for students at seven different sites to participate with each other. Besides student-to-student interactions, students were able to speak and listen to state legislators, the chief justice of the South Dakota Supreme Court, the state attorney general, community leaders, and law-enforcement officials.

In **Tennessee,** students from across the state participated in sessions on at-risk youth, cultural diversity and prejudice, weapons and reform of the juvenile justice system. School teams developed violence prevention plans with assistance from community leaders.

In **Texas,** where gangs and drugs are considered to be the two major contributors to violence, students listened to a speech given by a college student who had once held positions of power within a gang. Participants made and presented collages representing their discussions on violence and violence prevention.

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In **Colorado,** presummit law-related education activities and a survey prepared students to discuss proposed bills on disruptive behavior in schools with a large group of state policy makers. Students made recommendations on the bills, suggested alternative strategies, and planned projects for their communities, such as tutoring elementary school children, erecting a Vietnam-style memorial for victims of violence, painting over graffiti, and making locker rooms safer.

Representatives of **Connecticut**'s law enforcement and corrections agencies help students consider issues related to correctional institutions, gambling, arson, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and teen exploitation. A teacher commented, "Here, they really get a broad spectrum of every area of law."

In **Delaware,** the United States attorney and state attorney general discussed violence and drugs with students. Following the summit, students were awarded minigrants for projects that demonstrate how young people can "Increase the Peace" in their schools.

In the **District of Columbia,** high school teams were assisted by adult mentors in designing and implementing projects to reduce violence in their schools and communities, such as a teen telephone hotline to report acts of violence. A local foundation funded several projects.

Students in **Florida** explored the impact of domestic violence with the governor during a summit that was broadcast by *Court TV*. The summit was followed by a three day mock trial competition, using a domestic violence case.

In **Georgia,** students formed work groups to study various topics—family dysfunctionality, weapons, the media, poverty—and bring recommendations to the summit for discussion. Participants selected recommendations to implement in their schools and communities.

In **Hawaii,** the summit empowered students to become actively involved in programs to reduce violence by increasing conflict management skills and techniques for dealing with racism.

In **Idaho,** students used information on law enforcement, juvenile justice, peer mediation, family violence, and substance abuse to develop action plans to reduce violence in their communities and schools.

After weeks of preparation, **Illinois** students were presented with three options for reducing violence: close high school campuses to outsiders, restrict violence on television, and build more prisons. After discussions with policy makers, including teleconferenced sessions with their United States senators, participants voted nearly two-to-one against all three.

In **Indiana,** middle school students used a law-related education curriculum to develop plans for reducing violence in their schools. They presented their plans to community leaders at the summit. According to the *Evansville Courier,* several students said they were leaving the summit with "a comforting sense that what they do matters."

In **Iowa,** high school students researched state legislation dealing with crime and violence (capital punishment, school violence, juvenile justice, and prisons), held subcommittee hearings, and made recommendations on their findings to state corrections, human rights, and education directors.

Participants at the **Kansas** summit attended sessions on violence prevention, child abuse, gangs, gun control, sexual harassment, and victim rights. A federal Secret Service agent gave a presentation on violence prevention as a career option.

Kentucky students studied school violence, domestic violence, dating violence, violent subcultures, hate groups/cultural diversity, and the media and their relationship to violence. Participants presented their topics to other students. Recommendations on addressing these issues were presented to panelists and sent to government agencies.

Louisiana's youth summit offered young people an opportunity to take an active role in preventing violence by and against youth by exchanging information with their peers and with district attorneys and lawyers about the juvenile justice system, domestic violence, and mediation.

In **Maine,** youth representatives from across the state surveyed schools about crime and violence. The summit provided an opportunity to present results, share their concerns, and hear comments on their plans for addressing violence from leaders in education and government, including a United States senator, state supreme court justice, state attorney general, state legislators, police chief, and lawyers.

The **Massachusetts** summit provided middle schools students with information on various topics, including substance abuse, violence in the media, conflict resolution and law enforcement responses to violence. Students conducted a mock trial demonstration before juvenile court judges.

In **Michigan,** students met in a "Law in Your Life" summit, through which they examined status offenses, victimless crime, violence in the media, and numerous legal issues.

Minnesota middle and high students held a mock legislative hearing on state Safe School violence prevention proposals. They then presented recommendations to a panel that included the state attorney general, state legislators, a city council member, a police officer, a PTA member, and a public prosecutor.

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